

Tracing Scholastic Science ('Ilm al-Kalâm): Evolution in Arab World and India

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Citation:Dr. Noor Uddin Ahmed(2024). Tracing Scholastic Science ('Ilm al-Kalâm): Evolution in Arab World and India,*Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(4), 6840-6844
DOI: 10.53555/kuey.v30i4.1568

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 10-02- 2023

Accepted: 27-04- 2023

ABSTRACT

'Ilm al-Kalâm, also recognized as Scholastic Theology, stands as a discipline within Islamic studies dedicated to probing the core tenets of the Islamic faith and presenting substantiated arguments to uphold them, thus addressing any doubts that may arise. This field of inquiry emerged as an essential response to the need for safeguarding the creed of Islam against the adverse influences of philosophical schools such as Jabariyya and Mu'tazila. *'Ilm al-Kalâm* primarily delves into Islamic doctrines, with particular emphasis on concepts like the Unity of God, the Divine Attributes, and the nuanced notions of universal and restricted prophethood. However, divergent opinions among Muslim sects regarding the specific articles of faith (Uṣūl al-Dīn) that require unwavering belief exist. As a result, an extensive corpus of literature has been generated in Arabic, enriching scholarly discourse in both the Arab world and India.

Keywords:'Ilm al-Kalâm, Scholastic Theology, Islamic sciences, Fundamental doctrines, Divine Attributes, Prophethood etc.

Introduction:

'Ilm al-Kalâm, a compound term in Arabic, combines the word 'ilm, meaning 'science', with kalâm, which translates to "speech". Hence, it is commonly rendered as 'Scholastic Science' or 'Theology'. It serves as a philosophical discipline designed for the study of Islamic theological principles through dialogues. In Islamic practice, this field of knowledge pertains to the pursuit of theological understanding through debate and argumentation. A scholar specializing in *kalâm* is referred to as a *mutakallim* (plural *mutakallimûn*). Various interpretations exist regarding the nomenclature of this discipline; one such interpretation suggests that the principal controversy within *kalâm* revolves around whether the Word of God, as revealed in the Qur'ân, can be regarded as part of God's essence and thus uncreated, or whether it constitutes speech in the conventional sense and hence created. ¹

Regarding *'Ilm al-Kalâm*, Al-Fârâbî (d. 950 A.D.) describes it as "a discipline that empowers individuals to uphold the doctrines and practices prescribed by the religious legislator and to refute any opposing views."² In this vein, Muslim theologians, or *mutakallimûn*, elaborate that *Kalâm* is the science dedicated to firmly establishing religious beliefs by presenting evidence and dispelling doubts. The realm of religious beliefs, or 'Aqâ'id, has been placed under the purview of *'Ilm al-Kalâm*, offering clarification and defense on matters of faith to safeguard against the influence of doubters and deniers. ³

A new theological movement emerged as a reaction against the innovations of the Mu'tazilites towards the end of the third century A.H. This movement, spearheaded by proponents known as *Mutakallimûn*, utilized *Kalâm* as a rational science aimed at reconciling authenticity with religious laws. It is noted that the true pioneer of scholastic theology was Abû al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arî (260-324/873-935) of Basra. ⁴

As previously mentioned, several factors contributed to the advancement of the science and literature of *'Ilm al-Kalâm*. Notably, Wâsil ibn 'Aṭâ' (d. 131 A.H. / 748 A.D.) is credited as the founder of the Mu'tazilid school. Initially a disciple of Ḥasan al-Basrî (d. 728 A.D.), Wâsil ibn 'Aṭâ' diverged from his teacher's creed during a class discussion on hadith interpretation, leading him to develop his own rational reasoning and arguments. Consequently, those who adopted Wâsil ibn 'Aṭâ's teachings became known as the Mu'tazilids. ⁵

Besides Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā', figures like 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd and the precursor Dirar ibn 'Amr played significant roles as early proponents of Mu'tazilid doctrine. The Mu'tazilite school subsequently split into two factions. Abū al-Hudhayl al-Allaf (d. 841 A.D.) is recognized as the founder of the Basra school, which gained strength through collaboration with figures like Mu'ammār, al-Nazzām, al-Jāhiz, al-Jubba'i, and Abū Hashim (d. 933 A.D.). Meanwhile, the Baghdad school was led by Bishar ibn al-Mutamir (d. between 825 - 840 A.D.). Noteworthy individuals such as al-Murḍar, Thumama, al-Khayyāt, and al-Ka'bī (d. 931) contributed significantly to enhancing the reputation of this school.⁶

Mu'tazilism emerged as a movement seeking to interpret religious doctrines through reason. Mu'tazilids were recognized as independent thinkers who held diverse views on various religious and philosophical matters.⁷ This overview aims to underscore the contributions of Mu'tazilid scholars.

In support and defence of Mu'tazilism, al-Khayyāt authored a controversial manual titled *Intisār* against Ibn al-Rawandī. The Qāḍī, 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025 A.D.), initially penned a book named *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa al-'Adl* and later composed *Kitāb al-Majmū' fī al-Muḥit bi al-Taklīf*. Additionally, in the modern era, we encounter a synthesis of scholastic theology titled *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* (1965 A.D.) by Dr. 'Abd al-Karīm Uthmān bin Maḥmūd al-'Uthmān from Syria (1929 - 1972 A.D.). He pursued academic degrees from a Bachelor's in Sociology to a Ph.D. in Islamic Philosophy from Jami'a Fu'ad al-Awwal University in Egypt. However, it is noted from a reliable source that the aforementioned work was compiled by a Zaydī disciple.

Of note, the teachings of 'Abd al-Jabbār were preserved in the book titled *Mu'tamid fī al-Uṣūl al-Fiqh* by his disciple, the jurist Abū al-Ḥusayn Ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Basrī.⁸ In this context, Professor Fariq adds that Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā', the progenitor of Mu'tazilid doctrine, authored several manuals including "Kitāb Asnaf al-Murjia," *Kitāb al-Manzila Bayna al-Manzilatayn*, and *Kitāb al-Khutab fī al-Tawhīd wa al-'Adl*.⁹

The influence of Greek rational dialectics on Mu'tazilid thought is evident, whereas the Ash'arids emerged in opposition to Mu'tazilism. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (b. 873 - d. 935), initially a Mu'tazilite follower, later diverged from the school's doctrines and developed his own theological stance. After renouncing Mu'tazilism and embracing his father's faith, he authored ninety-nine works to establish a middle ground in theology. Earlier, Muhammad Ibn Ishāq of Nishapur wrote a critique of Mu'tazilite rationalism, which gained prominence with the support of Caliph al-Mutawakkil in 847 A.D., thereby promoting orthodox Ash'arism.¹⁰ The Ash'arids aimed to strike a balance between philosophy and orthodoxy, becoming the primary theological lineage of Sunni Islamic thought. The foundation of Ash'ariyya, the most widely accepted and official school, is attributed to the 10th to 19th centuries. Several of Ash'arī's works have endured, including *Luma'*, *Ibāna*, and "Maqalāt al-Islamiyyīn," serving as invaluable sources on earlier theological schools.¹¹ Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1049 - 1111 A.D.) contributed theological works such as *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* and 'Aqīda, along with *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, addressing morality and theology, and *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, critiquing Greek philosophy.

Najm al-Dīn Abū Hafs 'Umar al-Nasafī (1068-1142 A.D.) authored the seminal work 'Aqā'id, a significant contribution to Scholastic Theology. Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī (1086 - 1153 A.D.) supported the Ash'arite theological system and wrote "Kitāb al-Milāl wa al-Nihāl," providing an in-depth study of religious philosophy. Sirāj al-Dīn 'Alī al-'Ushī composed *Amālī* in 1173 A.D., a didactic poem elucidating Islamic faith principles. "Mulhat al-'Iṭiqād," a critical work on Ash'arite theology, was penned by 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn 'Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī (1182 - 1262 A.D.), known as *Sulṭān al-'Ulamā'*.¹²

Moreover, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Kitāb Asās al-Taqdīs* and "Muhassal," al-Maturidī's "Kitāb al-Tawhīd," and al-Jurjānī's "Sharḥ al-Mawāqif" are pivotal works on Muslim faith doctrines. In the modern era, the theological contributions of Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī (d. 1897 A.D.) are commendable. He authored a manual titled *Radd 'Alā al-Dahriyyīn* (Refutations of the Materialists), which effectively countered contemporary sceptics and deniers. The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Shaykh Myhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), wrote a book on 'Aqā'id named *Risāla al-Tawhīd*, which presented Islam in an appealing manner to capture the attention and interest of modern audiences.¹³

To illuminate the field of 'Scholastic Theology,' an endeavour has been made to highlight the philosophical developments that arose from the translation of Aristotle's works into Arabic. Indeed, a thorough study of these works catalyzed the emergence of Islamic philosophy.¹⁴ While it is acknowledged that its roots lie in Greek sources, the Holy Qur'ān and the Noble Hadith served as central influences for centuries. Muslims, deeply immersed in Qur'ānic teachings, made philosophical knowledge accessible in Arabic during the third A.H. / ninth A.D. century. Despite its Qur'ānic foundations, Islamic philosophy has been shaped by various intellectual perspectives, including scholastic theology and Sufi doctrines.¹⁵

Shihād al-Dīn ibn Abī al-Rabī' authored a book, considered one of the earliest philosophical works in Arabic, at the request of Caliph al-Mu'tasim around 840 A.D. The work, focusing on political matters with psychological insights, was later printed in Cairo under the title *Suluk al-Mālik fī Tadbīr al-Mamālik*.¹⁶ Abū Ya'qūb al-Kindī (d. around 260 A.H. / 873 A.D.), known as the philosopher of the Arabs, laid the groundwork for early peripatetic philosophy in Arabic. He synthesized Islamic principles with Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism in his treatises such as *Fī al-'Aql* (On the Intellect) and *Fī al-Falsafa al-'Ulā* (On Metaphysics), which wielded significant influence in the Muslim world.

Abû Naşr al-Farâbî (d. 339 A.H. / 950 A.D.) of Khurasan, central Asia, was the foremost disciple of al-Kindi and the true pioneer of Peripatetic Philosophy. He provided commentary on Aristotle's Organon and his magnum opus, *Kitâb Arâ' Ahl al-Madîna al-Faḍîla* (The Book of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City), aimed to synthesize Plato's political philosophy with Islamic political thought. Thus, he is credited as the founder of Islamic political philosophy and the introducer of formal logic in the Islamic world. Notably, he endeavoured to demonstrate harmony between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.¹⁷

Abû 'Alî al-Ḥusayn Ibn 'Abd Allah Ibn Sina, commonly known as Ibn Sina (Avicenna), penned a seminal manual titled *Kitâb al-Shifâ'* (The Book of Healing). This work stands as a vast synthesis of peripatetic thought, exerting significant influence across multiple dimensions of Islamic intellectual discourse for centuries. Notably, both proponents and detractors of Islamic philosophy extensively engaged with his two seminal books, *Kitâb al-Najâh* (The Book of Salvation) and *Kitâb al-Ishârât wa al-Tanbihât* (The Book of Directives and Remarks). Additionally, Ibn Sina's corpus includes visionary recitals and philosophical as well as mystical treatises, enriched with *al-Hikma al-Mashriqiyya* (Oriental Philosophy), which hold profound significance in the realm of philosophical literature.

Abû Bakr Muhammad Ibn Zakariya al-Râzî, who flourished as an authority in Medicine, Philosophy, and Chemistry, stands as the inaugural great clinical physician in the annals of medical history.¹⁸ His philosophical doctrine chiefly revolves around the eternity of five entities: God, the universal soul, first matter, absolute space, and absolute time. Moreover, al-Râzî, among independent philosophers, contested the necessity of prophecy.¹⁹

Another significant figure, Abû Rayhân al-Birûnî, contributed to the critique of Avicennian natural philosophy while introducing Hindu philosophical ideas into the Islamic world. Additionally, Ahmad Ibn Miskuyah authored the pioneering Islamic work on philosophical ethics, named *Tahdhîb al-Akhlâq* (Purification of Morals), which holds a prominent place in the development of ethical thought within Islamic philosophy.²⁰

During the period spanning the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, notable theologians such as Abû Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111), Abû'l Faḥ al-Shahrastânî (d. 1153), and Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî (d. 606 A.H. / 1210 A.D.) authored treatises critiquing peripatetic and Ismâ'îlî philosophy. Al-Ghazâlî's critique of peripatetic philosophy is articulated in his autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalâl* (The Deliverance from Error). However, his manual named *Maqâsid al-Falasifa* presents him, according to Latin Schoolmen, as a peripatetic. Finally, he composed *Tahâfut al-Falasifa* (Incoherence of the Philosophers) to dismantle the views of philosophers and accuse them of straying from Islam by denying the creation of the world.

Of significant note is Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî's *Sharh al-Ishârât* (The Commentary upon the Isharat), a critical work against Ibn Sina's *Kitâb al-Ishârât*, staunchly opposing peripatetic philosophy. Nasir al-Dîn al-Tûsî (d. 1274) provided a celebrated rebuttal to al-Râzî's work, staunchly supporting Ibn Sina's philosophy. In Spain, Ibn Masarra (d. 931), the Sûfi Islamic philosopher, profoundly influenced later thinkers. He was succeeded by Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), a jurist, theologian, and philosopher, renowned for his book *Ṭawq al-Ḥamâma* (The Ring of the Dove), esteemed for its exploration of platonic love.

Subsequently, the Spanish philosopher Ibn Bajjah (d. 1138) authored the philosophical masterpiece entitled *Tadbîr al-Mutawahhid* (The Regimen of the Solitary), a significant work concerning perfect intellect. Following him, Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185) penned *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzân* (Living Son of the Awake), employing symbolic language to address the harmony between intellect and revelation. Ibn Rushd (1126 - 1198), known in Latin as Averroes, the preeminent Islamic philosopher of the Maghrib, endeavoured to reconcile faith and reason, notably in his work *Faṣl al-Maqâl* (The Decisive Treatise). He earnestly sought to embrace peripatetic philosophy by responding to al-Ghazâlî's *Tahâfut* in his own *Tahâfut al-Tahâfut* (Incoherence of the Incoherence).²¹

'Abd al-Ḥaqq Ibn Sab'în (d. 1270) of Murcia, renowned as the founder of the mystic sect of the Sab'îniyya, authored several significant works rooted in the doctrine of *Wahdatu'l-Wujûd* (the transcendent unity of being). Meanwhile, 'Abd al-Rahmân Ibn Khaldûn (1332 - 1406) of Tunis expounded upon the philosophy of history in his *al-Muqaddima* (prolegomena). Additionally, Muhyi al-Dîn Ibn 'Arabî (d. 68/1240), the expositor of Sûfi metaphysics, cast considerable illumination and influence on Sufism and Islamic philosophy.

Theosophy is said to have been advanced by Shihâb al-Dîn Suhrawardî (d. 1191), who amalgamated Platonic philosophy, Neo-Platonism, the wisdom of ancient Persians, and Avicennian philosophy into the matrix of Islamic gnosis, birthing a potent new philosophy of thought. His masterpiece work, named *Hikma al-Ishrâq* (Theosophy of the Orient of Light), propagated spiritual philosophy, leaving a profound impact not only in Persia but also in Ottoman Turkey and the Indian subcontinent.

Furthermore, Ibn Turkah Isfahânî (d. 1427) emerged as a prominent figure in the realm of philosophy, endeavouring to synthesize various schools of *Ishraqi*, *Mashshâ'î*, and *'Arif*. Similarly, Nâsir al-Dîn al-Tûsî (d.

1273) forged a closer integration of philosophical activity and Twelver Shi'î theology in his work, *Kitâb Tajrîd al-'Aqâ'id* (The Book of Catharsis of Doctrines), which is regarded as a major work of Shi'î *'Ilm al-Kalâm* (scholastic theology).

A new phase in Islamic philosophy was inaugurated by Mir Dâmâd (d. 1041/1631), who taught in the city of Isfahan during the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in Persia. His most renowned student, Şadr al-Dîn Shirâzî (Mulla Sadra; d.1050/1640), authored a magnum opus titled *Al-Asfâr al-Arba'a* (The Four Journeys), serving as a veritable summa of Islamic philosophy. Mulla Sadra integrated the schools of *Mashshâ'*, *Isshrâq*, *'Irfân*, and *Kalâm* into a vast synthesis, which came to be known as *Al-Hikmah al-Ilahiyya* (Theosophy).²²

As mentioned earlier, the true founder of scholastic theology was Abû'l-Hasan al-Ash'arî (d. 935 A.D.) of Basra. It is noteworthy that during the medieval period, Muslims were primarily inclined towards two theological schools: the Ash'arite and the Mu'tazalite. However, the Indo-Muslim intelligentsia of the 13th century did not wholly adopt either of these schools of thought. Nevertheless, the majority of people tended to lean towards Ash'arite doctrines, which formed the foundational principles of Islam.²³

During the medieval period in India, a plethora of Indian scholars made significant efforts to contribute original works on Kalâm, accompanied by commentaries and marginal notes. The notable works from this period include as follows:

1. The book titled *Hujjat Allah al-Bâligha*, composed by Shâh Walî Allah (1176 A.H.) of Delhi, is widely regarded as one of the most original contributions from Indian Islam to Muslim religious thought. Indeed, the name and fame of this work are held in parallel with the esteemed positions of the works of Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Rashid Ridâ.²⁴
2. *al-'Aqâ'id al-Sunniyya* of Shaykh Uthmân b. 'Isâ of Sind (d. 1600 A.D.).
3. *Sawâ' al-Sabil* of Shaykh Kalîm Allah JahânAbâdî (d. 1728 A.D.).
4. *Sharh al-'Aqâ'id al-Nasafiyya* of Sayyid Muhammed b. Yûsuf al-Husaynî of Delhi.
5. *al-Fawâ'id al-Qâdiriyya Sharh al-'Aqâ'id al-Nasafiyya* of Moulavi 'Abd al-Qâdir bin Idris of Sylhet.
6. *Sharh al-Fiqh al-Akbar* of 'Abd al-Qâdir b. Idrîs of Sylhet.
7. *Sawâti' al-Alham Sharh Tahdhib al-Kalâm* of Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabî
8. *Sawâti' al-Alham Sharh Tahdhib al-Kalâm* of Shaykh 'Abd al-Nabî b. 'Abd Allah of Gujarat.
9. *Hâshiya 'Alâ Sharh al-Dawinî 'Alâ al-Addiyya* of Shaykh Wajîh al-Dîn al-'Alwî of Gujarat.
10. *Hâshiya 'Alâ al-Urwah al-Uthqâof* 'Abd al-Hâkim b. 'Abd al-Rabb of Lucknow.
11. *Hâshiya 'Alâ Sharh al-'Aqâ'id lil-Taftajânî* of Shaykh Wajîh al-Dîn al-'Alwî of Gujarat.²⁵
12. *Hâshiya 'Alâ Hâshiya al-Khiyâlî* of 'Allama 'Abd al-Hâkim b. Shams al-Dîn al-Siâlkûtî.
13. *Hâshiya 'Alâ Sharh al-Maqâsid* of Shaykh 'Allama wajîh al-Dîn al-'Alwî of Gujarat.
14. *Zubdah al-'Aqâ'id* of Shaykh Muhammad Gauth b. Nâsir al-Dîn al-Shâfi'î of Madras (Chennai).
15. *al-Mu'taqid al-Muntaqid* of Fadl Rasul b. 'Abd al-Mazid of Badayun.²⁶

In short, Islamic scholars categorize Islamic teachings into three main components: doctrines ('Aqâ'id), morals (Akhlâq), and law (Aḥkâm). *'Ilm al-Kalâm* is a crucial aspect of the Islamic code of life, and scholars across the Arab peninsula to the Indian subcontinent have dedicated works to it in the Arabic language. The renowned work *Hujjat Allah al-Bâlighah* by its author Shah Walî Allah Dihlavî has significantly contributed to all three aforementioned categories, earning him fame throughout the Muslim world.

Discussion:

It has been stated earlier that the compound term 'Ilm al-Kalâm, combining 'ilm (science) with kalâm (speech), serves as a theological discipline for the study of Islamic principles through debate. Notably, Abû al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arî pioneered scholastic theology. Mu'tazilism, led by figures like Wâsil ibn 'Atâ' and al-Khayyât, sought to interpret doctrines through reason. Defences of Mu'tazilism include al-Khayyât's *Intisâr* and works by Qâdî 'Abd al-Jabbâr. Dr. 'Abd al-Karîm Uthmân bin Maḥmûd al-'Uthmân synthesized scholastic theology in *Sharh al-Uṣûl al-Khamsa*. Wâsil ibn 'Atâ's teachings were compiled in various manuals. Notably, Mu'tazilid doctrine was expounded upon by his disciple, Abû al-Ḥusayn Ibn al-Tayyib al-Basrî.

In fact, the Mu'tazilid thought, influenced by Greek rational dialectics, sparked the emergence of Ash'arid opposition. Abû al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arî, initially a Mu'tazilite, later forged his own theological stance, birthing Ash'arism. Noteworthy figures like Najm al-Dîn Abû Hafṣ 'Umar al-Nasafî and Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî made seminal contributions to Ash'arite theology. Jamâl al-Dîn Afghânî and Shaykh Myhammad 'Abduh's modern theological works further enriched Islamic discourse. Meanwhile, the translation of Aristotle's works into Arabic catalyzed the emergence of Islamic philosophy, with figures like al-Kindî and al-Farâbî shaping early peripatetic philosophy and Islamic political thought.

Ibn Sina's *Kitâb al-Shifâ'*, a synthesis of peripatetic thought, influenced Islamic discourse. Al-Râzî pioneered medical and philosophical concepts, contesting prophecy's necessity. Ibn Bajjah and Ibn Tufayl contributed to philosophical literature. Al-Ghazâlî critiqued peripatetic philosophy, while Ibn Rushd sought harmony between faith and reason. 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Ibn Sab'în and Ibn Khaldûn furthered mystic and historical philosophies. Suhrawardî's theosophy left a profound impact, while Mulla Sadra integrated diverse

philosophies in *Al-Asfâr al-Arba'a*. Al-Ash'arî's scholastic theology gained traction against Mu'tazilism. Indo-Muslims leaned towards Ash'arite doctrines, shaping Islamic thought.

Conclusion:

In fact, the diverse landscape of Islamic scholarship reflects a rich tapestry of intellectual inquiry spanning centuries and continents. From the pioneering works of philosophers like Ibn Sina and al-Râzî to the theological debates between al-Ghazâlî and the peripatetic philosophers, Islamic thought has continuously evolved and adapted to new challenges and contexts. The contributions of scholars such as Ibn Rushd, Ibn 'Arabî, and Suhrawardî demonstrate the breadth and depth of Islamic philosophy and mysticism, while figures like al-Ash'arî and Mulla Şadra have shaped theological discourse and scholastic theology. The enduring legacy of these thinkers underscores the enduring relevance of Islamic thought in the modern world, serving as a source of inspiration and guidance for scholars and seekers alike.

We are aware of the fact that the credit of India in scholastic science is evident from its significant contributions to *ʿIlm al-Kalâm*, a fundamental aspect of Islamic scholarship. Scholars across the Indian subcontinent have dedicated extensive works to this field in the Arabic language, demonstrating their profound engagement with Islamic theological principles. The renowned work *Hujjat Allah al-Bâlighah* by Shah Walî Allah Dihlavî stands as a testament to India's scholarly heritage, contributing substantially to doctrines, morals, and law within Islamic teachings. This underscores India's pivotal role in shaping and enriching the intellectual tradition of Islamic scholarship, earning recognition and esteem throughout the Muslim world.

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